

# **Walking with Peter**

**by**

**Gareth Randall**



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## Preface

Seven of the twelve poems, dramatic monologues which make up 'Walking with Peter', were written over some twenty years. I first put pen to paper in 1994. I was ordained priest that summer; made a deacon the summer before. I was in my tenth year at Dame Alice Owen School as a Senior Teacher, the Director of Studies, my first year as Head of RE, having swapped from teaching English the previous year. The first five poems were written from February to June. Ten years later, towards the end of the school summer holidays, I wrote the next two.

I used the seven on a weekend retreat I led for the parish of St Andrew's Cuffley and St Thomas, Northaw that Autumn. I then used the first four for a day retreat I led for the Brittany Clergy Chapter in 2008 on the edge of St Pierre de Plesguen at the then home of Denise Peacock, a former Reader here at St Bartholomew's. 'Storm on the Lake', 'So right – so wrong', 'At what cost', 'Get out of gaol free' and 'Peter's gate' were written when I decided to revise them.

'Walking with Peter' is the forerunner of 'The Bartholomew Gospel' which over the past two and half years you've had the chance to read. Now, over the next twelve months, I'd like to share them with you so you might see how I think Peter may have made sense of what happened to him.

Enjoy !

*Father Gareth*  
*November, 2015*



## *A fisher of men*

"From now on, you'll be catching men."  
So he says and so I am.  
Jesus, wandering Rabbi, miracle worker,  
who'd have thought I'd have followed  
him,  
me, a fisherman, a family man,  
not the type of man  
to be anyone's disciple,  
abandon what I have for the wilderness.  
My brother Andrew's another matter:  
he used to follow John the Baptist  
till John pointed him to Jesus.  
"Behold, the Lamb of God," John said,  
and from then on, Andrew was his;  
Even took me to meet him.  
Odd . . . he seemed to know me,  
like he was waiting to meet me.  
He called me by my name, Simon,  
then nicknamed me Peter, the rock.  
Later, he came to Capernaum,  
causing a sensation in our synagogue,  
exorcising a man, demon-possessed.  
He stays with us.  
My wife's mother's ill in bed  
so she couldn't see to us  
so Jesus sees her instead.  
and she's up, waiting on us.  
He's teaching by the Lake  
with such a crowd round him  
he has to get into our boat  
to be heard and seen.

But I'm dead tired:  
been out fishing all night  
not catching a thing  
so I'm sat there,  
half-listening.  
Dismissing the crowd,  
he says "Let's go fishing.  
Push off from the shore.  
Cast out your net.  
Draw in a catch."  
"We were fishing last night.  
We didn't catch a thing !"  
But we do as he says  
and we do –  
too heavy a netful to land !  
But with James and John's help,  
we have our best catch ever.  
In the heat of the day,  
I shiver:  
I guess who it is  
in the boat with me,  
Jesus, Messiah, Son of God.  
I sink under a wave of guilt.  
"You need to go, Lord.  
I'm no good,  
not good to be with."  
But all he says is, "Don't be afraid.  
I'll make you a fisher of men."  
And so I prove to be.



## *Storm on the Lake*

“Jesus, wake up !  
Don’t you care  
we’re going to drown ?”  
We were caught  
out in the dark  
on the lake  
in a storm.  
The end of a long day.  
Crowds of people.  
Jesus teaching.  
Truth in story,  
pictures in words –  
‘sowing seeds’,  
‘bearing fruit’,  
‘lamplight’ –  
our experience  
embodying fact:  
how to live,  
how to do  
what God wants.  
By the end,  
we were tired.

All we wanted  
was to get away,  
eat then sleep,  
Instead, the wind had got up  
and now was blowing a gale  
and we were going nowhere  
except down to the bottom !  
While we panicked, Jesus slept  
so we shout to wake him up  
and he simply stands up  
and tells the wind and water  
to behave and they do.  
Like naughty children  
caught misbehaving,  
they fall silent and still  
in the presence of their Master.  
And we fall silent, too,  
gob-smacked by this sign  
that Jesus really is  
who we think he is,  
the Son of God,  
our Saviour.



## *Walking on Water*

Night on the Lake,  
rowing in a head-wind,  
straining on our oars,  
making little progress.  
The day's been hard:  
crowds of people, hungry  
for more than teaching.  
A boy's given us  
five loaves, two fish.  
Jesus takes them,  
blesses them,  
breaks them,  
gives them to us  
to give to the people.  
There's enough for all  
and nearly a riot –  
"Jesus for king!"  
We go off in the boat;  
he gets rid of the crowd:  
he needs to be alone  
to pray on the hillside.  
The wind is howling,  
making rowing pointless.  
Then, we see something,  
walking towards us,  
a ghost on the water.  
Terrified, we scream!  
But Jesus calls to us  
and all is well.  
Am I stupid or what?

I so want to be with him;  
I call to him, "If it's you,  
tell me to come to you."  
"Come." And I do.  
Slipping over the side,  
the waves take my weight;  
and I'm walking on water  
to my teacher, to my friend.  
I'm looking straight at him  
till the wind and the waves  
distract me, break eye-contact.  
I lose sight of him  
and immediately,  
I began to sink.  
"Save me, Lord!"  
He reaches out to grab me,  
lifting me up,  
supporting me  
back into the boat.  
Good to feel firm wood  
wet underfoot again.  
"You're the Son of God!"  
We all say what we all know,  
but seldom say to him.  
Safe on shore,  
all seems unreal,  
like waking up  
from a bad dream  
except Jesus is real,  
truly God's Son.



## *So right – so wrong*

Caesarea Philippi,  
walking on our own  
in the countryside.  
when Jesus asks,  
“Who do people say I am ?”  
We say, “John the Baptist,  
Elijah or one of the prophets.”  
Then he asks us,  
“What about you ?  
Who do you think I am ?”  
Before anyone  
has a chance,  
without hesitation  
I jump straight in,  
“You’re the Messiah,  
the Son of God.”  
And he says,  
“Well done, Simon;  
how right you are.  
For you are Peter  
and on that rock  
will I build my Church  
which will last  
come what may.  
And you will have  
the keys of the kingdom,  
and the ability  
to forgive wrong-doing.”  
Then he tells us  
what being the Messiah  
in practice will mean -

that he will suffer  
then die  
that we may live.  
And I’m upset,  
scandalised,  
so I tell him,  
“No way !  
That’s so not going to be !”  
But he tells me  
just to shut up  
because it’s the devil  
talking through me.  
The way of the cross  
is a ‘has-to-be’,  
a God-given, agreed.  
And I feel stupid.  
I only said what I said  
out of friendship  
to protect him,  
to keep him safe  
and I’m told off  
for being his friend,  
told off because I care,  
care enough to try  
to make things better.  
I guess my heart’s  
in the right place  
even if my brain isn’t !  
How right, how wrong,  
can I be ?

17/19 11 15



## *At what cost ?*

I've given up everything  
to follow you, Lord.  
Everything once I had:  
my family, home, my job  
to say yes to you, to do  
what you would have me do  
when you called me to you.  
So how much has it cost  
to follow you, my friend ?  
Today, a good Jewish boy  
came to you to ask  
what he had to do  
to inherit eternal life.  
You clearly liked the lad  
but he clearly didn't like  
what you had to say to him.  
He wasn't prepared to do  
what you asked him to:  
to keep the commandments  
was no problem for him –  
he did that already –  
but Jesus' challenge to him  
was to give up everything,  
give his wealth to the poor,

give his riches to the needy,  
then come and follow him,  
be one of us.  
No chance; no way;  
not possible for him  
to give up what he has  
when God's been so good,  
so very gracious to him.  
Well, if the rich  
can't get to heaven,  
what hope is there for us ?  
But Jesus promises us  
100 times as much  
as we have given up  
for sake of him.  
So who is truly rich ?  
The wealthy,  
burdened with goods,  
or the poor,  
freed for the Kingdom ?  
The prospect of eternal life  
surely makes us rich.

21 1 16





## *Cock Crow*

“Before cock crow,  
you’ll deny me thrice.”  
The words hurt me,  
sharper than my sword.  
One of us will betray him,  
Jesus says, and I’m shocked.  
“That’s not going to happen.  
We’ve been with you too long.  
How could we betray you ?  
I never will !”  
We go out into the night  
and I grip my sword  
and it gives me strength  
to do what I need to do.  
In the Garden of Gethsemane  
among the olive groves,  
Jesus goes off to pray alone.  
I try to pray  
but I fall asleep:  
exhausted; confused;  
the food, the wine,  
all too much for me.  
Twice he comes, wakes us up  
and twice I nod off again.  
The third time, we’ve got company –  
Temple guards come to arrest him.  
No way ! I draw my sword  
and, in one upward sweep,  
slice off a man’s ear

as he goes for Jesus.  
“Don’t be a fool.  
Put your sword away.”  
He doesn’t need my help.  
Jesus heals the man’s ear  
then lets them arrest him  
while we slip away.  
But, true to my word,  
I follow at a distance  
to the High Priest’s  
right into his courtyard.  
I join the edge of a group,  
keeping warm round a brazier.  
In the charcoal glow,  
a voice recognises me,  
says I’m one of them.  
“Do what ? No way !” I say.  
Another says I must be,  
so I reply, “You must be joking !”  
A third chips in, “With that accent,  
you have to be from Galilee –  
like your friend, Jesus.”  
“Leave it out !  
I don’t even know him ! !”  
And, to confirm the truth of what I say,  
somewhere in the dark, a cock crows.  
That dark-before-dawn swallows me  
as, in tears, I run away from the truth.  
May God forgive me.

31 3 94 / 14 11 15



## *Do you love me?*

We're back in Galilee.  
Jesus has died  
but his tomb is empty.  
He's appeared to Mary,  
to Thomas, to all of us,  
and our world's upside down.  
But still, there's fishing,  
our old way of life  
with old certainties  
but we caught nothing.  
Tired, at daybreak,  
close to the shore,  
a stranger shouts;  
"Any luck, lads ?  
Cast out to the right."  
What a joker !  
But we'd nothing to lose  
so we throw out the net  
and our lines go taut  
with the weight of fish caught.  
John recognises him first;  
"It's Jesus !"  
Stripped for work,  
I grab my clothes  
and plunge into the sea.

He's by a charcoal fire  
standing cooking fish  
on a fire like the one  
in the courtyard  
the night I said  
I didn't know him.  
He breaks the bread,  
divides the fish  
and we have breakfast.  
No one asks who he is –  
we all know for sure.  
Then he speaks to me.  
"Simon, son of John,  
do you love me more than anyone ?"  
My heart skips a beat.  
Course I do;  
does he need to ask ?  
I'd given up everything  
to be with him.  
"Yes, Lord,  
you know how much I love you."  
"Feed my lambs." . . .  
"Simon, son of John,  
do you love me ?"  
Hadn't I just said ?  
What does he want from me ?  
"Yes, Lord,  
you know I really love you."  
"Tend my sheep." . . .  
"Simon, son of John,  
do you love me ?"

A third time;  
the same question;  
what's wrong ?  
Doesn't he trust me ?  
What's he want me to say ?  
"Lord, you know everything.  
You know I do;  
you know I love you."  
"Feed my sheep."  
Three times by a charcoal fire,

I'd denied him.  
Three times by a charcoal fire,  
I say I love him.  
Now I'm at peace.  
I know he loves me,  
accepts me as I am –  
my faults, my failings –  
and I'm free to serve him,  
looking after our flock.  
Nothing else matters:  
I'm loved by the man I love  
and I'm free to do his will.

24 6 94 / 15 11 15



## *Pentecost*

It's Shavuot.  
We're twelve again.  
Judas is dead  
by his own hand  
or God struck him down –  
so much for money –  
and, chosen by lot,  
Matthias takes his place.  
Jesus has ascended into heaven  
and we're left, waiting  
for the coming of the Holy Spirit –  
the promise we'll never be alone;  
he'll be with us always.  
We've come together to pray  
with Mary, his mother,  
when we hear a strange sound  
like wind rushing over water  
from the hills around the Lake  
when a storm's about to break.  
Then the room is filled with light:  
tongues of flame seem to divide  
then settle on each one of us  
and I feel the excitement I felt  
when I was with Jesus.  
We shake with laughter  
and talk in languages  
foreign to our ear.  
Like the Jordan in spate,  
we overflow with praise of God.  
We burst into the street,

sharing the joy of knowing God.  
Strangers stop to listen,  
amazed we speak their language.  
But some, on the edge of the crowd,  
sneer at our stumblings,  
diss us as drunks.  
I raise my arms, call for peace,  
and I, an ordinary fisherman,  
speak of the extraordinary,  
of what I've seen first-hand:  
God's love for his people.  
I tell them we live in the time  
the prophet Joel speaks of  
when the Spirit of the Lord  
will be poured out on his people.  
Jesus is our Messiah,  
Son of David, Son of God,  
who came to show us the way  
but we ignored him,  
had him crucified,  
and we're guilty of his death.  
We need to repent and be baptised.  
We need to turn away  
from what's wrong,  
to ask for forgiveness  
for what we've done wrong.  
It's ours for the asking.  
Many did,  
and on that day,  
the Church was born.

25 6 94 / 16 11 15



## *Kosher*

My world has changed for good.  
I was a good Jew;  
trying my best  
to be righteous,  
live a good life  
according to the Torah –  
circumcised, kosher,  
keeping clean, being pure,  
faithful to our Law.  
Jesus, our Messiah,  
fulfilled our Jewish hope:  
the Son of David come  
to free the Children of Israel  
and restore the Kingdom of God.  
When he was snatched from us  
and killed on account of us,  
I see now it's for more than us.  
A dream changed everything.  
Joppa, the house of Simon the Tanner.  
Midday, a hot day, at prayer.  
Hungry, alone on the roof,  
I must have fallen asleep.  
I see a sail, full of animals,  
lowered down from heaven  
and I hear a voice saying,  
“Get up, Peter, kill and eat.”  
“No, Lord. I can't; I mustn't.  
I've never eaten unclean food.”  
“Anything I've made clean is clean.”  
Twice the vision repeats itself;  
three times I see, I hear,

making sure I've understood.  
Then, the sound of strangers  
down below wakes me up.  
I'm being asked to come to Caesarea,  
to the house of Cornelius, a centurion.  
An angel has appeared to him  
and told him to send for me.  
I go with some fellow believers  
and we enter a Gentile's house  
where I tell those present,  
about Jesus, God's Son, our Saviour.  
As they listen to what I say,  
the Holy Spirit touches them  
and, inspired and enthused,  
like us they speak in tongues.  
My companions are astonished:  
Gentiles, uncircumcised,  
have received the Spirit !  
So I say to them,  
“If our God has gifted Gentiles  
with the power and the presence  
of the Holy Spirit,  
can they not be baptised ?  
Why not ? So I do.  
Now my world's a bigger place –  
all of us possible Children of God;  
the Lord, our God, a light  
for Gentiles, Jews, alike !  
How gentle, all embracing,  
the love of God for Man.

24 8 04 / 17 11 15



## *Get out of gaol free*

Not my first time in prison  
nor I doubt my last.  
John and me were arrested  
the day I healed a beggar  
outside the Temple,  
by the Beautiful Gate.  
The priests didn't like us  
speaking up about Jesus  
but we were let off  
with a warning not to again.  
But, of course, we did  
and Herod Antipas,  
wanting to please people,  
had me arrested.  
He'd already had James,  
John's brother, executed.  
After Passover, I was next.  
Four sets of soldiers  
guarded me in turn,  
day and night.  
2 outside the door;  
2 in the cell with me;  
chained to soldiers  
by my wrists.  
Not free –  
no privacy – to do  
what needs doing.  
Not nice, not good,  
not easy to be  
alongside strangers  
who don't like you.  
It was dark.

I was cold.  
I was hungry.  
Then, like a vision,  
like a dream,  
out of nowhere  
came an angel.  
"Get up," he said.  
"Get dressed.  
Let's go."  
I did as bid.  
Asleep, the soldiers,  
just lay there,  
chained to the air.  
I was free to leave.  
The door opened  
and I slipped out,  
unnoticed, out  
past the guards,  
out into the night.  
Alone in the street,  
I made my way  
to John Mark's house,  
to the Upper Room,  
where they were praying for me.  
When at last they let me in,  
I told them what had happened,  
told them to tell James,  
then sought safety elsewhere.  
Later, I heard my guards  
met the fate meant for me.  
God knows why I was spared.  
I guess He's other plans for me.

14/16 12 15

## *Quo Vadis*

“Where are you going, Lord ?”

But where am I going ?

Rome; persecution; end times.

I’ve spent the best part of my life

following the way he points.

The good news is spreading:

that Jesus is Lord,

Son of God, Saviour.

Born of a woman,

died on the cross,

rose again from the dead,

ascended into heaven,

and one day to return

to judge the living and the dead.

Faith in him, belief in him,

has taken me this far,

far from Lake Galilee,

far from Jerusalem,

to the heart of Rome.

“You are Peter

and on that Rock

will I build my Church.”

But is my faith firm enough

for his confidence in me ?

Ours is a Church for all:

for Jew, for Gentile,

for the slave, for the free.

Me, I’ve been in prison,

but I’ve always been freed

till today, the end in sight.

Nero hates us:

ideal scapegoats –

foreigners, women, slaves,

on the margins,

ripe for blame.

So who can blame me,

leaving a place not my own ?

Sunset, unnoticed,

I slip through a gate

but who is on the road,

coming towards me ?

It’s Jesus !

He hugs me to him

and I know again

what he means to me

“Where are you going, Lord ?”

“Into the city to lay down my life

so all may believe the truth.”

Ashamed, I turn back

to follow my teacher,

my friend, into the night.

Who better with

to end my days ?

25 8 04 / 18 11 15



## *Peter's gate*

*"The keys of the kingdom"*

*Matthew 16 v19*

I have the keys of the kingdom.  
Jesus entrusted them to me  
to keep for all eternity.  
So I stand as doorkeeper,  
gatekeeper, always ready  
to unlock and to open the way  
to all through God's grace  
who are called to enter in  
to the delights of heaven.  
But none living can know  
what delights await therein.  
Brother Paul rightly wrote,  
'No eye has seen nor ear heard  
what is to be hereafter.'  
Brother John, however, saw  
that there would be 'a new heaven'  
and 'a new earth', 'a new Jerusalem'  
where there would be 'no weeping',  
'no mourning' for none are sick  
and death itself has died –  
God in the centre of our life

and we in perfect adoration.  
So what can I say to help you  
understand what is to come ?  
Let me simply say to you  
that heaven is like the best –  
whatever that might mean to you.  
To me, it means to be together,  
present with the one I love  
who loves me as I love them  
and to be perfectly at ease,  
conscious, connected, content,  
in union with otherness.  
So let me encourage you  
to live life the best you can,  
then to die a good death,  
well knowing in your heart  
that all will be well  
and that you will hear  
the one you love say to you,  
"Well done, good and faithful.  
Enter in and eat with me."

20 1 16

